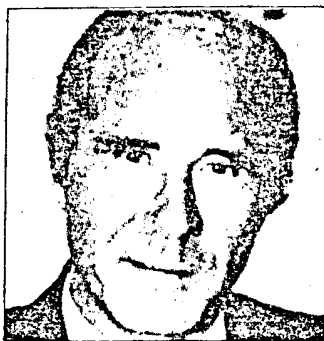


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INQUIRY

Topic: DISINFORMATION

Arnaud de Borchgrave, 59, a Belgian native now a U.S. citizen, is a former Newsweek editor who covered 17 wars and 90 countries. With Robert Moss, he wrote *The Spike*, a book about Soviet KGB operations in the Western media, and *Monimbo*, a novel about Cuban terrorism. He was interviewed for USA TODAY by free-lance writer Dennis M. Blank.



Arnaud de Borchgrave

USA TODAY
16 January 1985

which I find extraordinary. There is only one institution in the country, Boston University, which teaches a course on disinformation.

USA TODAY: Can you cite a significant recent example of disinformation?

DeBORCHGRAVE: The most recent one was announced by FBI Director William Webster, Director of the FBI, appointed by Jimmy Carter in 1978 because of his liberal civil rights background. After extensive investigation, the FBI had concluded that the letters written to heads of African states, allegedly by the Ku Klux Klan, warning them to keep their athletes out of the Olympics or they would be in danger of being gunned down were forged by the KGB.

USA TODAY: Are journalists really that gullible?

DeBORCHGRAVE: Dr. Robert S. Liken, who has testified before congressional committees against funding the "contras" in Nicaragua, admitted after his latest trip to Nicaragua that the contras enjoy widespread support from the population. In fact, he comes down very hard on the U.S. press covering Nicaragua for being taken in by a larger group of Marxist internationalists.

USA TODAY: But how has the American press been taken in?

DeBORCHGRAVE: You see mass rallies in favor of the Sandinistas on your evening television news. What you've never been told by our media is that ration cards are confiscated if you fail to show up at these so-called spontaneous rallies. People are jailed simply for asking Sandinistas embarrassing questions.

USA TODAY: Are you saying that the press is deliberately suppressing some stories about Nicaragua?

DeBORCHGRAVE: I don't think the stories are being spiked. They were just never written. When I was down in Nicaragua, the local guru of the press corps was Bianca Jagger, playing the role of the Jane Fonda of Central America. She was organizing trips to

Mosquito Indian land to show happy Indians resettled in their new villages. Did that ever come out in the press, how reporters were getting to these villages? Not a word came out, and I watched for it.

USA TODAY: How did disinformation as a political tool evolve?

De BORCHGRAVE: It started right after the Soviet revolution. The head of the Cheka, the forerunner of the KGB, started Department D, which stood for demoralization. He was in charge of running demoralization operations in capitalist countries. When Yuri Andropov took over the KGB in 1967, disinformation became a full directorate, known as Service A. The general in charge told his staff: "We must all convince Western journalists, either directly or through third parties, of exactly the opposite of our real intentions. If anyone writes about our real intentions, it must quickly be dismissed and ridiculed as a man or woman of the right, as a fascist and McCarthyite." This is quite extraordinary because it has worked over and over again.

USA TODAY: Were some of the first stories about Yuri Andropov — that he was a closet liberal who loved American jazz — examples of disinformation?

DeBORCHGRAVE: I was having breakfast with the former head of French intelligence when that story first came out. He told me, "There

Soviets use journalists to spread their lies

USA TODAY: You have charged that the Soviet Union uses the Western news media to spread disinformation — false charges planted by the Soviets in Western media to further their aims. Is it really dangerous?

De BORCHGRAVE: The most important media voice in France, Jean-Francois Revel, who was editor and chief of *Le Express*, wrote a new best-seller, *How Democracies Perish*. In it, he demonstrates how disinformation has quite literally presented a new ideology. It has one basic principle — to consume a society and stifle the revolutionary ardor of Western workers in order to bring down capitalism. It shows how disinformation preys on the lifeblood of democracy.

USA TODAY: How can disinformation do that?

DeBORCHGRAVE: By corrupting the data and distorting understanding in such a way that it misleads public opinion. For example, how is our Congress expected to make intelligent decisions on an administration request for funding the contras who are fighting the Marxist Sandinistas in Nicaragua? On the basis of what they have read about Nicaragua in our media? The consensus is that the Sandinistas are a popu-

lar, home-grown revolution. It's no such thing.

USA TODAY: But is disinformation really that pervasive in the USA?

DeBORCHGRAVE: There are about three examples in the press every day. The State Department has issued eight reports in the last two years which cite disinformation examples by the score. I could not find one journalist in 300 who interviewed me on a recent book promotion tour who had heard of these reports,

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is the next head of the Soviet Union. He is already planting disinformation about himself." That was a preposterous story -- that he was not only a liberal, but that he entertained leading dissidents at home over highballs, liked to listen to jazz records, liked to read Jacqueline Susann novels, and spoke good English, which turned out to be drivel.

USA TODAY: What sort of hard evidence do we have that disinformation is a problem?

DeBORCHGRAVE: We now have a scholarly work, *Dezin-*

formatsia, written by two Democrats, Richard Shultz of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and Roy Godson of Georgetown University. They confirm that the Soviets are spending \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year on disinformation operations in the Western media.

USA TODAY: Do American journalists agree that disinformation is a problem?

DeBORCHGRAVE: Until recently, the notion was pooh-poohed by the entire profession. Many editors said that the American media were run by people who were far too astute to allow anything so crass as Soviet disinformation.

USA TODAY: But you think disinformation efforts in the USA are extensive?

DeBORCHGRAVE: It's all-pervasive and all-intrusive. I think it is extraordinary that the editors of major American newspapers still reject that assertion and have the notion that if disinformation does go on, it doesn't go on in their papers. Yet, you can actually spot it in their papers all the time. What do you call it then? Is it sheer ignorance?

USA TODAY: How do they respond when it is brought to their attention?

DeBORCHGRAVE: They will just tell you they are giving equal time to these people. That is one of the answers you get quite frequently when you spot it. I find it extraordinary that we should give equal time to people who have been trained in the basic Leninist precepts, which hold that to tell the truth is a dirty bourgeois habit. For a revolutionary to lie and to lie convincingly is not only a sign of intelligence, but imperative when furthering a

revolutionary cause. How can you give equal time to people who believe that to tell the truth is stupid?

USA TODAY: Why did you write *The Spike*? Was it because some of your stories were spiked?

DeBORCHGRAVE: Oh, yes. I had very important stories spiked. One was May 11, 1978, which was a French intelligence secret report documenting the links between the KGB and international terrorist groups operating in Western Europe. I flew to the United States on the Concorde with that story because it was too sensitive to be sent by telex. Things started getting unglued after a couple of hours. The story got shot down by people who simply could not believe that

these kinds of things were going on under the umbrella of detente.

USA TODAY: Has the European press been more open about disinformation?

DeBORCHGRAVE: Yes, far more open. What was rejected by my editors as utter nonsense in 1978 has just been published by two people in a book called *Terrorism: The Soviet Connection*. Alexander Haig, when he first became secretary of state, went public with the accusation that much of the terrorism today is aided, abetted, and funded by the Soviets and their countries. He was laughed out of the court by the mass media, which dismissed it as Cold War rhetoric. When

George Shultz repeated this recently, he was not laughed out of court. The evidence is now overwhelming and irrefutable. It's amazing that it takes years for these perceptions to penetrate in America when they have been penetrating in Europe for years.

USA TODAY: How do you feel about that?

DeBORCHGRAVE: It terrifies me. I can't believe we are that naive. In many instances, we are terminally naive, which is more dangerous than suffering from terminal cancer.